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30 July 1981

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, SE [redacted]

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FROM: [redacted]

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SUBJECT: USSR and Eastern Europe Review Article on
"Moscow's View on Victory in General
Nuclear War"

1. The article, challenging recent assessments of victory as a Soviet goal in general nuclear war, is generally useful in helping to keep attention on the victory issue within the Intelligence Community. How the Soviets assess the nature of, prospects for and means to achieve victory in a general nuclear war should continue to be evaluated and debated as a priority intelligence concern. But in offering guidance for further analysis, the article is misleading both as to what evidence can or should be brought to bear and what is really worth worrying about in treating the victory issue. [redacted]

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2. In particular, the article suffers from the following defects:

- o It calls for evidence to support the "victory" case which probably never will be available;
- o It misleadingly characterizes the available circumstantial evidence by suggesting that a comparable case could be made for victory as a US objective;
- o It offers no evidence on Soviet strategic programs to argue that the Soviets have a concept of force sufficiency which falls short of victory;
- o It relies too heavily on Soviet leadership assertions to argue the case against victory and provides no context for determining whether these assertions should be accepted at face value;

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- o It draws misleading--and potentially dangerous--implications for US policy from a Soviet belief or non-belief in victory. [REDACTED]

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3. No "Ideal" Evidence. The article argues that the view of the Soviet leaders on the efficacy of their programs and capabilities to meet the requirements for victory would be highly relevant evidence. So it would be. Indeed, just as it would be nice to see an actual Soviet five year defense plan, so too it would be nice if the Soviets made available to us a war plan for achieving victory and an evaluation of how their current and future forces measured up. But we are unlikely ever to be so lucky. It is clearly something that the Soviets would never treat in open sources and only in the most veiled terms in classified sources. We are still having a hard enough job figuring out how they go about measuring force balances, without also being called on to provide the criteria for judging how these would relate to their assessments of achieving victory. [REDACTED]

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4. Misleading Characterization of the Circumstantial Evidence. While we lack conclusive proof, there is no particular reason to doubt the large body of circumstantial evidence on the trends and composition of Soviet strategic activities which points to victory as a plausible goal for Soviet force building and a military objective to be sought in the event general nuclear war occurs. The judgments in NIE 11-3/8-80 rest largely (but not entirely) on this circumstantial evidence, as the introduction to the OPA article appropriately notes. The article is seriously misleading, however, in characterizing this evidence. It suggests that there is somehow comparable evidence which Soviet analysts could cite to argue that victory was also a US objective. This is simply not the case. [REDACTED]

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5. On the whole official US defense policy for close to twenty years has operated on the principle that general nuclear war is unwinnable. Ingenious Soviet analysts have, of course, argued to the contrary by pointing to PD-59 and the Schlesinger and McNamara counterforce precursors. And they also have cited public statements by US officials that, even while subscribing to the doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), US targeting has not been confined solely to city-busting. But the thrust of official US policy does not support their argument. Indeed, since the advent of MAD in the mid-1960s (and notwithstanding current official reevaluations of US nuclear strategy), the US has only sporadically considered even waging a general nuclear war, much less aspiring to victory. [REDACTED]

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6. McNamara realized early on that the pursuit of a war-waging capability (even oriented primarily to strengthening deterrence), by emphasizing counterforce and other damage-limiting measures, threatened open-ended strategic expenditures. A secure second-strike capability which could reliably inflict a level of unacceptable damage on Soviet society was an attractive alternative. This provided a basis for establishing economically tolerable force ceilings. It also placed a premium on avoiding deployments which could weaken Soviet confidence in reliably inflicting similar unacceptable damage on the US. Failure to do so, it was reasoned, would prompt runaway arms racing and make for itchy trigger fingers in a crisis. This at least was the theory. Despite US advances in ICBM accuracy, MIRVing and the like, the US on the whole tried to live up to the theory. [REDACTED]

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7. Victory is Consistent with Evidence of Serious Soviet Interest in War-Waging. The persistent Soviet counterforce emphasis, their civil defense program, and other strategic programs, as well as military doctrine strongly suggest that the Soviets never bought "unacceptable damage" or any comparable criterion as a gauge for determining how much was enough. They did attain a credible second strike capability for inflicting unacceptable damage on the US in apparent accord with MAD prescriptions. But this was not--and is not--the sum and substance of their strategic force planning. Nor, as far as one can gather, did they ever approximate US sensitivity to the destabilizing effects of forces that went beyond MAD prescriptions. There is probably no more vivid illustration of this than the Soviet attitude to LOTW. The US approaches reliance on LOTW even now--in the face of our ICBM vulnerability problem--with considerable trepidation because of the chances for miscalculation. Both Soviet commentary and other evidence indicating their interest in LOTW suggest that they view it as a significant and welcome addition to their strategic employment options. [REDACTED]

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8. The OPA article appears to concede the point that such evidence points to a Soviet approach to general nuclear war which takes war-waging seriously. Having victory as an objective is at least consistent with this approach. Contrary to OPA's argument elsewhere in the article, however, victory is not consistent with the approach which the US has largely followed for close to twenty years. It is hard to see how victory could have been a further objective of official US policy if the possibility of

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seriously waging a general nuclear war has been denied in the first place. [redacted]

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9. Victory is Consistent with Evidence on the Momentum and Scope of the Soviet Strategic Effort. This leaves us, of course, with the problem of trying to figure out whether the Soviets believe victory, in some meaningful sense of the term, can be the outcome of seriously waging a general nuclear war or whether they would have to settle for something considerably less. The debate here should mainly focus on trends and composition of strategic forces and related activities--such as the civil defense effort, development and exercises of employment options, data bearing on Soviet evaluations of pre- and post-attack force balances and the like. NIE 11 3/8 and other finished intelligence, both last year and in previous years, have extensively treated these topics and others as well that bear on the issue. They will be treated in NIE 11-3/8-81 and in IIMs and other intelligence assessments underway on related topics, such as

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10. Existing assessments have not proved conclusively that victory is the Soviet objective in waging a general nuclear war. They have not claimed to do so. There is no expectation that such definitive proof will be possible in the future. [redacted]

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11. Nevertheless, the overwhelming weight of the evidence on the trends and composition of Soviet strategic activities is that the Soviets both take war-waging seriously and have sought continuous augmentation and improvement of their capabilities to this end. We believe this is consistent with pursuing such an ambitious objective as victory in general nuclear war. Particularly in light of the relative restraint in US strategic efforts as the Soviet buildup has proceeded, we believe this growth in capabilities is much less consistent with the more moderate objectives of simply matching or gaining a slight edge on the US. [redacted]

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12. Key Evidence Required for Arguments Against the Victory Notion. We clearly cannot rule out that the Soviets have, in fact, established a criterion for force sufficiency that falls short of victory but is more ambitious than merely matching or gaining a slight edge on the US. If they have such a criterion, however, we have not discerned it. The OPA article maintains--without supporting evidence--that

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Soviet leaders do not see their military forces and programs as sufficient to achieve victory in general nuclear war. It is certainly possible they believe this with respect to current capabilities. But this still leaves the question of what goals they have set for force building. Evidence of a Soviet criterion that falls short of victory would go a long way toward buttressing the OPA case. [REDACTED]

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13. Such a criterion is not adequately expressed in the popular claim that the Soviet objective in a general nuclear war is "to come out relatively better off than its adversaries." This expression may be attractive because it seems less ominous than victory but in the abstract it offers very little to go on. Where does "coming out relatively better off" leave off and victory begin, in setting force goals? Presumably, the requirements for victory would only be more stringent than those called for "to come out relatively better off." They may simply require more time and/or effort to achieve. Making a useful distinction, therefore, would appear to require some evidence that the Soviets in fact have settled for types and levels of forces that would indicate a clear stopping point in their effort--short of what they could have done if victory was their goal. [REDACTED]

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14. The OPA case also would be strengthened by evidence indicating some difference in Soviet requirements for deterrence and actual war-fighting. The OPA article argues that deterrence is the first priority for Soviet strategic force building. Fighting a nuclear war as effectively as possible is the second priority. Although forces oriented to "war-waging" (rather than MAD) may serve both objectives, the requirements for deterrence could conceivably be less stringent than those for actual combat--certainly less than victory would appear to require. We believe, however, that the Soviets regard the breakdown of deterrence as a real possibility and the potential consequences of such a breakdown as too serious to pin their hopes on forces capable of only (or even mainly) meeting deterrence needs. But if OPA has evidence to the contrary, we would welcome it. [REDACTED]

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15. Issues for Further Evaluation and Debate. This still leaves room for argument over:

- o How far the Soviets believe they have come in acquiring forces adequate for victory;

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- o Whether they believe they can realistically maintain this objective in the 1980s;
- o What other military and civilian priorities or objectives they believe should be weighed in the balance in deciding whether to continue to pursue victory in the future. (For example, it is not clear whether acquiring the central system capabilities for victory in general nuclear war would necessarily outweigh the objective of maintaining a preponderance in other forces to assure victory in theater conflict.) [REDACTED]

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16. There is also room for argument over the trade-offs the Soviets might be prepared to make in numbers and types of systems, in order to continue to pursue the goal of victory in general nuclear war in the 1980s while trying to serve other military and foreign policy objectives. The OPA article argues that the Soviets "rest whatever hopes they have of prevailing in such a war on political, social, economic, and ideological strengths as much as on military ones--the same combination of factors that they think would enable them to prevail in the absence of war." Chief of the General Staff Ogarkov, for one, has argued that non-military factors provide the "objective" possibilities for victory. But he has also argued that they will by no means suffice. And the Soviet strategic buildup has provided eloquent testimony to back him up. Even so, the Soviet willingness to accede to equal ceilings and sub-ceilings in SALT II also suggests, for example, that they have not been wedded to the notion of maintaining a large edge in ICBM and SLBM launcher numbers as a military requirement for victory. [REDACTED]

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17. Political and Military Leadership Statements on the Victory Issue. Leadership statements on the victory issue obviously cannot be dismissed as relevant evidence, but they should be used to supplement one's case (for or against) and not make it. It does seem appropriate, after all, to view these statements in proper context. Otherwise, it is all too easy to indulge in an analytical poker game in which three statements by Politburo member Chernenko on the catastrophic consequences of nuclear war appear to beat two Ogarkov statements on the need for forces to defeat the capitalist enemy completely. [REDACTED]

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18. The most important context for weighing such remarks is the evolution of Soviet strategic forces for the last 15 plus years. This context seems much more

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significant than the "ideological" context usually cited (to be sure, not explicitly in the OPA article) in arguments against the victory notion. It is often argued that the Soviets do not (or can not) really mean it when they refer to victory. They merely have to make obeisance to the ideological claim that socialism will ultimately triumph over capitalism. It is scarcely mentioned, however, that this Soviet concern for ideological purity may also mean that the Soviet leaders continue to take seriously what the ideology teaches them about the nature and causes of war even in the nuclear age. Maybe they do really believe that war cannot be ruled out so long as capitalism exists. Maybe they do really believe it will be a fight to the finish which can meaningfully be won or lost. In any event, the Soviet strategic buildup lends more support to this reading of the continuing impact of the ideology than to the interpretation usually presented in arguments against the victory notion. [REDACTED]

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19. The second most important context for weighing leadership statements is the foreign policy setting in which these statements have been advanced. The Soviets have been attentive to the potential US and European reaction to strident comments from the Kremlin. Surely one has to be skeptical of taking the Soviets at their word, for example, in arguing routinely from the late 1970s on that military superiority has not been the Soviet aim. Against the backdrop of disenchantment in the US over the terms of SALT I, the Yom Kippur War, Angola and the like, it must have occurred to Moscow that pushing the "no superiority" line made sense to try to blunt a Western military response. Indeed, we know for sure that--whether they mean it or not--the Soviets have been attentive to getting this message across to the West. Valentin Falin (of the CC International Information Department) claimed as much in a public interview in November 1979. He asserted that, as an offer to President-elect Carter, the Soviets said for the first time in no uncertain terms on 18 January 1977 that superiority was not their aim. [REDACTED]

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20. The apparent importance to the Soviets of maintaining the "no superiority" line was also indicated in Ogarkov's otherwise "hard line" piece on military strategy in the Soviet Military Encyclopedia (signed to press in September 1979). Ogarkov emphasized that various military measures were called for specifically to achieve victory (or completely defeat the enemy) in general nuclear war. These included: "the timely and many-sided preparation of the armed forces;" "the combined efforts of all the armed services and their branches;" "the maintenance of the combat

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readiness of the armed forces...on a broad plane" (which, according to Ogarkov, Brezhnev stipulated in 1970 as the "key to victory in war"); and "active defense"...(to permit a counter offensive which would aim at)...the complete defeat of the enemy." At the same time, even with this clearly stated concern for military measures to achieve victory, Ogarkov maintained that the USSR was not seeking military-technical superiority over the West. In the context of his other remarks this seems somewhat disingenuous. Indeed, Ogarkov's disclaimer directly contradicted the call for military-technical superiority advanced in 1976 in an earlier volume of the Encyclopedia. (Appropriately, this earlier volume pre-dated the "offer to Mr. Carter" in January 1977, cited by Falin.) [REDACTED]

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21. Recently, there has been a particularly heavy barrage of Soviet statements emphasizing the catastrophic consequences of nuclear war. It is always possible that this is now really the dominant Soviet outlook on nuclear war. But it also makes sense for Ogarkov (in a recent TASS gist of his forthcoming Kommunist piece) to drop the earlier references he made to victory and defeating the enemy and to focus instead on the catastrophic consequences of nuclear war. Among other things, that is clearly a message the Soviets would like to get across to a West European audience which is now considering the fate of LRTNF deployments and the prospects for future arms control on the continent. [REDACTED]

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22. Moreover, in Ogarkov's case in particular, the Soviets also have special reason now to exercise caution. Because of his standing in the military hierarchy, they know of course that his words will be regarded in the West as more authoritative than those from the usual run of military writers. But they also are well aware that his Encyclopedia article--even with its "no superiority" claim--helped strengthen arguments in the West about victory as a Soviet objective. For example, in an article in New Times in December 1980, Lev Semeyko (of the Institute for the Study of the USA and Canada) sought deliberately to counter this Western treatment of the Ogarkov article. Semeyko said that Ogarkov referred to victory "on a purely social, theoretical plane." In light of the several references by Ogarkov to specific military measures required for victory (cited above), this interpretation of the Encyclopedia article is nonsense. [REDACTED]

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23. The third context to be taken into account is the policymaking setting for resource decisions. Now in particular, with the US about to embark on a military buildup and with the new Soviet five year plan soon to get under way, the issue of victory may figure in wrangling over

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economic priorities. There is evidence that in early 1981 the military may have pressed (successfully) for adjustments in the plan. More recently, statements by Chernenko, reviving and criticizing the time-worn concept of the political nature of war, and an apparent riposte to these statements by Lt. Gen. Zhilin in the May issue of Kommunist also hint at some current "debate" underway which may bear on victory as a goal for force building in the 1980s. [REDACTED]

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24. At this stage hints are all we have, however. Arguments pro and con, on the political nature of war, may reflect a genuine difference of opinion over whether victory makes sense as a continuing objective. But it is also possible that the goal of victory may not be in question at all. Whether nuclear war can serve any rational political end may simply serve as a kind of code phrase for arguing about relative economic priorities. In any event, much more evidence is needed--and especially more than is offered in leadership statements--before the existence or outcome of such a "debate" can be established, particularly as regards the implications for victory as a continuing goal for force building. [REDACTED]

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25. Implications of the Victory Issue for US Policy. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the OPA analysis of the victory issue is the implications it draws for US behavior in a future crisis with the Soviets. Belief in the notion that the Soviets subscribe to "victory", it is alleged, may encourage unnecessary timidity on the part of the US. So it might. But then again for the US to dismiss this notion out of hand could potentially yield much worse than a foreign policy setback. [REDACTED]

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26. The OPA argument here appears to rest on a false dichotomy between a Soviet belief in victory and a Soviet appreciation of the costs of nuclear war. It is implied that the Soviets would be relatively sanguine about these costs--and indeed would almost be eager for war in the event of a crisis--if they believed in the possibility of victory. Conversely, the OPA article implies that the US could expect restraint from the Soviets, if they doubt the possibility of victory. [REDACTED]

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27. Concern with the potential high costs of nuclear war is not incompatible with seeking to wage--or even win--a nuclear war. Indeed, the attention the Soviets have devoted to damage-limitation efforts over the years clearly reflects such a concern. The US reluctance to pursue similar efforts is of course also indicative of an appreciation of the high potential costs of nuclear war. The difference is that the US has believed counterforce, ABM, civil defense and other measures to limit damage would themselves be likely to

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increase the chances nuclear war would occur. These efforts would be, according to US deterrence theory, "destabilizing". Whether the Soviets believe that they can really achieve victory now or in the future, they have simply not bought this theory. [REDACTED]

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28. Soviet reluctance to believe that deterrence stability can be assured by refraining from "destabilizing" deployments and their serious provision for war-waging (whether real victory is in the offing or not) suggest a different outlook on crises. They will not approach these situations (or an escalating theater conflict) with the simple assumption that a general nuclear war would be an unprecedented catastrophe. This concern may of course urge them to exercise restraint. But it will not be their only concern. They also will consider that the war could break out anyway and that failure to seize the initiative could result in even worse damage. [REDACTED]

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29. The Soviets, thus, would be likely to have competing incentives in a crisis. Their decision as to whether to exercise restraint probably would not be easy. It will depend on their evaluation of available employment options, force balances, other military factors and doubtless many intangibles as well. Whether or not to exercise restraint will by no means hang on their estimate of the prospects for victory alone. But a belief that they would compromise the chances for victory--in addition to their chances for limiting damage--would presumably strengthen the case in the Kremlin against restraint. Because of this--if for no other reason--the victory issue should continue to be of priority concern to the Intelligence Community. The OPA article is useful in this regard by helping to keep the issue alive. Nevertheless, it caricatures the complex tradeoffs the Soviets would confront in a crisis. It leaves the misleading--and potentially dangerous--impression that we have a simple gauge for their likely behavior: either no restraint, if they believe real victory is in the offing; or restraint, if they believe it is not. [REDACTED]

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